

service' in many States fall within the jurisdiction of local bodies, which are very often starved of resources. In most of the States, no legislation has been enacted till date in the form of a Fire Service Act for the proper administration of fire service. Then, so far as this incident is considered, we have never stated that it is an accident. We have clearly mentioned that about 6.00 p.m., on account of a short circuit, a fire started. So, we have only mentioned 'a fire started'. The Government of India had called for full details about the situation from the Government of Uttar Pradesh. The Government of Uttar Pradesh, in its reply, have not clearly specified as most of the Members have asked whether any NOC was taken from the Fire Department whether any NOC was obtained from the Fire Department. So, whether a NOC from the Fire Department was taken or not, has to be told only by the State Government. We have asked for their comments. The State Government has ordered an administrative enquiry into the incident by the Commissioner, Meerut Division. It has also ordered an enquiry by Additional District Collector, City, into the alleged complaints of removal of debris, using a JCB, on the night of the incident. In addition, the Police Department, after registering an offence under relevant sections, is also investigating into this incident. So, the administrative enquiry is enquiring into the reasons of the incident; careless on the part of administration and the concerned individuals for not taking efficient precautions. The enquiry is also going into the question of taking immediate action after the incident, steps to be taken so that such incidents do not occur in future. For this purpose, two commissions one, at the DC level; second, at the Additional Commission level have been ordered. In this incident, around 225 persons were involved, out of which 58 persons have died, 164 have injured and three are missing. Compensations have been paid to their families by the State Government. Some hon. Members have asked for a judicial enquiry. The Government of Uttar Pradesh has taken up the issue with the hon. High Court, Allahabad. So, we can expect a judicial enquiry. So far as disposal of dead bodies is concerned, an enquiry by the Additional District Magistrate, Meerut, has been ordered. So, I think, this is the sufficient reply.

SHORT DURATION DISCUSSIONS

Steep Rise in Prices of Essential Commodities in the Country— (contd.)

श्री श्रीगोपाल व्यास (छत्तीसगढ़): आदरणीय उपसभापति जी, आपने मुझे इस विषय पर कुछ कहने के लिए अंततः अवसर दिया है, इसके लिए मैं आपको बहुत धन्यवाद दे रहा हूँ। माननीय

मंत्री जी जब कल यहां कुछ देर नहीं थे, तब दोनों पक्षों की ओर से सुरसा के समान बढ़ती जा रही महंगाई के आंकड़े दिए जा रहे थे। मैं उन्हें नहीं दोहराऊंगा, क्योंकि माननीय मंत्री जी और बाकी सभी सदस्यों का समय बड़ा मूल्यवान है। मैं विश्वास करता हूँ कि यहां उपस्थित माननीय सदस्यों ने उनको इसके सम्बन्ध में कहा होगा। परन्तु यह सुना गया कि 20 वर्षों में इतनी महंगाई, विशेषकर जीवन के आवश्यक वस्तुओं की, जो सामान्य मनुष्य के जीवन के लिए आवश्यक न्यूनतम वस्तुएं हैं, जैसे - आटा, चावल, दाल, आदि के सन्दर्भ में नहीं हुई, यह बात सुनी गई थी। जब खाद्यान्नों के बारे में आयात की बात होती है, तो देशवासियों के मन में बहुत ही क्लेश होता है। यह भरत भूमि है, सारे विश्व का भरण-पोषण करने वाली। जब खाद्यान्न और आवश्यक वस्तुओं के आयात के बारे में सुनना पड़ता है, तो मन में बहुत दुःख होता है। क्या यह कहना पड़ेगा कि

भीख मांगता है कुबेर झोली फँला कर

कण-कण को मोहताज देश का कर्ण हो गया।

कुछ सम्माननीय सदस्यों ने यह भी कहा कि कुछ लोगों का हित करने के लिए नीतियां बनाई गई हैं। महोदय, इस देश में "सर्व-जन" की बात छोड़ दीजिए, "सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः" की बात कही गयी है, लेकिन क्या आज हम बहुजन हिताय भी कर सकेंगे?

महोदय, मैंने पढ़ा है कि सीमेंट आदि की महंगाई के कारण भवन निर्माण में 28 से 47 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई है। प्रश्न सोचने का यह है कि संविधान में रोटी, कपड़ा व मकान को मूलभूत वस्तुओं के रूप में माना गया है। अब रोटी और मकान के जो आंकड़े दिए गए हैं, उन से स्पष्ट होता है कि वे हमारे हाथ से जा रहे हैं। भगवान न करे कपड़ा भी हमारे हाथ से चला जाए। एक माननीय सदस्या ने दूध का जिक्र किया, किसी ने पानी का भी जिक्र किया। बहुत खराब लगता है, लेकिन हमें इस संदर्भ में कहना पड़ेगा कि, "अबला जीवन हाय, तुम्हारी यही कहानी, आंचल में है दूध और आंखों में पानी"। महोदय, आज जन-जीवन त्रस्त है। माननीय उपसभापति जी, मैं आप के माध्यम से मंत्री जी से कहना चाहता हूँ कि 70 प्रतिशत लोग इस महंगाई से प्रभावित हैं, मध्यम व गरीब वर्ग पिस रहे हैं। मैं माननीय चिदम्बरम जी का बहुत सम्मान करता हूँ। यहां आने के पहले से मैंने उन के बारे में सुन रखा है। माननीय उपसभापति जी, माना कि श्री चिदम्बरम के अंबर में तर्क के बहुत तारे हैं, पर ध्यान रहे कि जो शीतलता सुशासन का चन्द्र दे सकता है, वह अग्नित तारे नहीं दे सकेंगे। आप की सरकार को आप की नीतियों से जो सहारा दे रहे थे, मुझे दिखाई नहीं पड़ रहे हैं कि वे सहारा देने वाले कहां गए? सर्वहारा की बातचीत करने वाले लोग, मैं माननीय मंत्री जी का ध्यान दिलाना चाह रहा हूँ आप के माध्यम से कि

सर्वहारा की बात करने वाले, सलाहकारों के असंतोष से उत्पन्न कर अपने दूरगामी लक्ष्यों को पूरा करने की गोटियां खेलने से आज की स्थिति निर्मित हुई है। महोदय, मुझे इसी सदन में राष्ट्रकवि मैथिली शरण जी द्वारा कही गयी बात कहने की इच्छा हो रही है। उन्होंने कहा था कि “आय और व्यय के लेखे की लिपि सदैव काली-काली, जली हमारी होली अभी दूर है दीवाली।”

कुछ सम्माननीय सदस्यों ने बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियों की साजिश और भ्रष्टाचार का भी उल्लेख किया। इस का उन्मूलन करना बहुत आवश्यक है। “आज देश में फैले हैं, रक्तबीज से भ्रष्टाचार कहां रहेगी शासन सत्ता, यदि न हुआ उन का प्रतिकार।” सभापति जी, कई माननीय सदस्यों ने जिनमें पूर्व वित्त मंत्री यशवंत सिन्हा जी शामिल हैं, वास्तविकता को ध्यान में रखकर उचित नीतियां बनाने के सुझाव दिए हैं। माननीय मनोहर जोशी जी ने तो प्रत्यक्ष महाराष्ट्र में अपने सफल अनुभव बताए हैं। मुझे उस समय सब से अधिक दुख होता है जब सरकार की संवेदनहीनता की बात उठाई जाती है। कुछ ने कल इस बारे में चेतावनी भी दी है। मुझे स्वर्गीय जय प्रकाश जी की पंक्तियां याद आ रही हैं, जो उन्होंने तत्कालीन माननीय प्रधान मंत्री जी को लिखी थीं। मैं वैसा-का-वैसा तो नहीं कह सकूंगा क्योंकि बात बहुत पुरानी हो गयी है, परंतु उस का आशय मैं आप से कह रहा हूं और जिम्मेदारी से कह रहा हूं। मैं उस समय कारागार में था और मैंने अपनी नोट बुक में लिखा था। उस का आशय यह था, उन्होंने उस समय की प्रधान मंत्री जी से कहा था कि, हो सकता है इस देश का साधारण मनुष्य प्रजातंत्र की परिभाषा न कर सके, पर याद रखना वह उचित और अनुचित का अंतर बखूबी जानता है। माननीय उपसभापति जी, समाप्त करने से पहले मैंने पचौरी जी से कहा था कि पांच मिनट से अधिक नहीं लूंगा। मैं उसका पालन करते हुए और आपकी भी बात को समझकर, आपने मुझे जो अवसर दिया, उसके लिए तो मैंने पहले ही धन्यवाद दे दिया था।

मैं आपके माध्यम से माननीय मंत्री जी से यह निवेदन करता हूं, मांग करता हूं कि काल के कपाल पर सुस्पष्ट दिख रही लकीरों को समझकर अपने शिवत्व को जागृत करें और इस मंहगाई के तांडव को रोकें। मैं समझता हूं कि इन सारी बातों को माननीय चिदम्बरम जी, वे जहां के हैं वहां के कारण, अच्छी प्रकार से समझते हैं। आप शिवत्व को जागृत कर मंहगाई के तांडव को रोकने के लिए कदम उठाएं, अन्यथा यह भस्मासुर आपको भी नहीं छोड़ेगा। इतना ही कह कर कि जो श्रेष्ठ लोगों ने कहा है, आप उनकी बातों की ओर अवश्य ध्यान देंगे, क्योंकि उपनिषदों का आदेश है:

“उत्तिष्ठत्, जाग्रत्, प्राप्यवरान्निबोधत्”

आपका धन्यवाद, महोदय।

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I am grateful to the hon. Members for initiating a discussion

on rise in prices of essential commodities. Firstly, we must look at the overall economic scenario and place the issue in context. After placing it in context, we must and I shall address price rise in individual commodities, which concern the common man. As far as items like rice, or, wheat, or sugar, or *urad*, or *tur* is concerned, whether it is a rich person or a poor person, everybody has to consume that. So, when I say that we will address the issues of the citizens of this country, it is an issue which concerns everyone; so, we are all concerned. Let me first set out the context. Sir, in a developing country, which is registering high growth rates, some inflation is inevitable. In fact, the years in which we had very low inflation were also years of very low growth. When credit expands, when investment expands, when money supply expands, it has an impact on prices. Now, what was the situation as far as the Wholesale Price Index is concerned. I will come to the CPI in a moment. The Wholesale Price Index, we have figures for several years. The average for 2001-2002 was 7.1 per cent; the average for 2003-04 was 5.48 per cent; the average in 2005-06, that is, the last year, was 4.43 per cent. Overall, there is a secular decline in the core inflation rate. But some inflation, around 4.5 per cent of 5 per cent, is inevitable in a developing country. We have to manage interest rate, exchange rate, and the inflation rate. The triangulation of these three makes it very difficult to strike a balance unless you take steps from time to time. I think we are managing it reasonably well. The WPI as per the last report, is 3.95 per cent, just below 4 per cent, and when it is looked at in the Consumer Price Index, the last figure for March, 2006 was 4.95 per cent. So, the overall inflation situation is under control, and, given that our growth rates are close to eight per cent, I am afraid, some inflation is inevitable. Now, within this overall inflation rate, prices of commodities behave differently as hon. Members rightly said, depending upon production, demand, supply and other market forces.

Now, concern has been expressed about the rise in prices of some commodities. I do not deny that. Some commodities have shown an increase in the trend in prices; some have shown a decline. For example, commodities like groundnut oil, mustard oil, *vanaspati*, loose tea, salt have all shown a decline over the last two years. When prices decline sharply, producers complain; consumers are happy. Take, for example,

mustard oil. Two years ago, on this day, it was fifty-five rupees a kilo; today, it is forty-nine rupees a kilo. Mustard producers are complaining. Some prices are declining. Likewise, as I said, some prices have increased. For example, take rice. I am looking at Delhi prices. Two years ago, its price was Rs. 12.50 per kilogram; this year, yesterday, it was Rs. 14 per kilo in Delhi. The price of atta was Rs. 9 per kilo earlier and now, it is Rs. 11 in Delhi. But it is the prices of pulses which have shown a sharp spurt, and I will come to that in a moment; especially, *urad and tur* have shown a sharp spurt. Sugar is another commodity but it is affected by different factors; sugar has also shown a rise. But within each commodity, prices vary from city to city; prices vary from State to State. Take, for example, gram. in Patna, it is Rs. 24 a kilo, whereas in Lucknow, it is Rs. 29.50 a kilo, and, in Delhi it is Rs. 31 a kilo. So, even within a commodity, where there is some marginal price increase, it varies from city to city, State to State. This is really because of the trader behaviour, demand and supply, purchasing power of the local community, local people and the willingness of the State Governments to take strong action against blackmarketeers and hoarders. I believe many of you were here when the Agriculture Minister replied on the overall agriculture situation. We have had to import wheat because arrivals of wheat in the *mandis* have been lower this year; and the procurement has been lower. We started with a low stock position. We had to give a bonus and we had to augment the total availability of wheat in this country, that will be imported wheat. I believe he has given, in my view, a very strong justification why we did the twin steps, one of increasing the price as a bonus to our domestic producers, and at the same time, augmenting the total availability of wheat by importing a certain quantity of wheat.

Now, as far as steps taken are concerned, in wheat we have announced an import of 35 lakh tonnes. In sugar, we have — in sugar, the reason is, the world availability is lower because a lot of canes being diverted for ethanol; world prices have risen; India's prices are rising in sympathy with the world prices — released 42 lakhs of free sale sugar for the quarter April-June, which is 8 lakh tonnes higher from the releases during the corresponding period last year. Subsequently, additional releases of two lakh tonnes were also announced. To contain volatility in the prices of wheat, sugar and pulses, the Forward Market Commission has taken some steps reducing the circuit filter limits and increasing the margins.

My immediate concern is pulses, and I wish to spend a few minutes dealing with pulses. Now, as far as production of pulses is concerned, these are the figures. It has stagnated between 130 and 140 lakh tonnes for several years now. Just in recent years, in 2003-04, the total production was 149 lakh tonnes, in 2004-05, it was 131 lakh tonnes. In 2005-06, the production was 139 lakh tonnes. It goes up a few lakh tonnes and comes down a few lakh tonnes. More or less, it is stagnant. We start with a low stock position and then we have a marginal increase in production. It impacts prices. The reason is, the pulses are grown mainly on marginal and sub-marginal land under rain-fed conditions. Less than 15 per cent of the area under pulses is irrigated exposing the output of pulses to the vagaries of weather. No major breakthrough in pulse production technology and improvement of high-yielding germ plasma has been possible because of inherent genetic problems and narrow adaptability in the whole variety of pulses. This is a long-term issue. I know it is being addressed. But frankly we have not made any breakthrough. Now, some pulses are predominantly consumed only in the sub-continent. Many of them are not grown abroad or in any other country. Arhar, Gram, Masoor, Moong, Urad etc., are predominantly sub-continent pulses. Imports have also stagnated at about 13 lakh tonnes in 2004-05 and 13-1/2 lakh tonnes last year. That is because many of these pulses are not available and the total surpluses available in the international market are also limited. There is a mismatch. This is a reality that we have to face. There is a mismatch between demand and supply of pulses; demand and availability of pulses; and this impacts prices. A number of policy measures are under contemplation by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The Forward Markets Commission has taken some steps to increase margin requirements and to switch over to delivery-based markets. But these are to be addressed by the Agriculture Minister. Immediately, what is that we can do? We can try to augment availability. We can augment availability by procuring more in the case of wheat and paddy that is available in the country and by importing, if necessary. In the case of pulses, the only way we can augment availability is to allow imports. The imports are being allowed. In the case of sugar, we can restrain prices by increasing the free quota. All this is being done. All this will have their impact once the monsoon sets in and there is prospect of a good harvest. You will find that there is a price-restraining effect of monsoons. This is a difficult month in all years. Whoever is the Government, these are difficult

months. The pre-monsoon month is a difficult month. The stock positions are low and the availability is also tight. There will be some impact on prices. But we are sensitive to the matter. As I said, this affects everyone—rich, poor, urban, rural. All of us have to consume this. We are sensitive to the matter and we will address that. For example the RBI's outlook on inflation is about 5 and 5-1/2 per cent. Last year, I said, my outlook on inflation is between 4 and 4-1/2 per cent. Thankfully, we had a lower inflation last year than what was projected. This year also, I believe that we will be able to contain inflation between 4 and 5 per cent. But within that band of inflation, we will do all that is possible in order to augment the availability of these commodities both in the domestic market and through imports. We will not hesitate import if availability has to be increased. I assure the hon. Members that we keep a close watch on prices. We are as concerned as everyone is. We are aware that in some areas, especially pulses, there is a sharp rise. But we will take the necessary steps to contain these prices. Thank you.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA (Jharkhand): Sir, hon. the Finance Minister was not present in this House when this subject was discussed yesterday. We had made a number of points. I am afraid, he has not been properly briefed as a result of which he has not touched upon a large number of issues which were raised by the Members of this House. It is a very, very unsatisfactory reply and we are not, at all, satisfied with the manner in which he has replied. We are not, at all, satisfied with the explanation he has given and, therefore, Sir, in protest against this we are walking out.

(At this stage some hon. Members left the Chamber.)

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, the discussion is over.

GOVERNMENT BILL

The Union Duties of Excise (Electricity) Distribution Repeal Bill, 2006

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, we take up the Union Duties of Excise (Electricity) Distribution Repeal Bill, 2006. Shri Pawan Kumar Bansal

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): Sir, I beg to move: